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Tarnow, Poland
Summer, 1942

I woke up that morning with a very happy feeling, and a memory of a lovely evening spent in the company of my friends. We had a party, sang and danced - and forgot for a short time about what tomorrow might bring..I met a young man, his name was Jurek - he appeared suddenly at the party having just arrived from Krakow. He was very mysterious, and hardly talked to anybody. I liked him, there was something very appealing in the way he acted.

There was something gnawing in the back of my mind. Suddenly, I became fully awake, and I sat up. I looked around at all the sleeping bodies around me. My parents and I shared one room with another family of 5 - parents with three boys. About two months ago, we were forced to leave our homes, and move to a small block of streets surrounded by barbed wire, unable to get out except being escorted to work by police at 6am and brought back in the evening. We lived in a former private home containing one family, where now 8 families lived crowded, sharing two bathrooms and one kitchen.

I realized with a sudden jolt that today was the day a lot of us will be deported to destinations unknown..

My parents and I worked, but in three different factories. My father worked in a cement factory, my mother in a textile firm, sewing uniforms, and I in a leather factory, sewing saddles for the soldiers.Two days ago, we were all ordered to come with our 'work passport books" to a designated area, and present ourselves personally to a German official who was going to ask us a few questions and put a stamp in our papers. The lines were huge, and it took a whole day well into the night to do so. When our turn came, my father got a round stamp, but my mother

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and I got a "K". We had no idea what it meant.

Next a day, a gloom fell over all of us. We heard rumors that the Germans are planning to round up everybody that got "K" on their work papers (we started to call it "KUGEL", which in German means a shot from a machine gun) and deport us, supposedly to a work camp. The first people to get "K" were older women, not looking too capable to work, with their children - all little children, or people the German Official did not like the look of.

Thinking about what lay ahead of us, I started to shake in utter terror. My mother seemed to sense something, because she woke up and came over to me, pressing me to her heart and hugging me. This was very unusual for her, because by nature, she was never very demonstrative. She kept kissing me and trying to comfort me. She whispered :'Please, sweatheart, don't worry, everything will work out fine, just stay close to me, I need to hold you. They are only taking us to a working camp - we will work and survive." But I could not stay still. I tore away, dressed quickly, and ran out of the house.

Our house was situated on the corner where the wire was surrounding the Ghetto. I could look over the wire and see people living across from us, moving freely, laughing walking..LIVING!..The young girls did not have to line out at 6AM to go to work, they were playing in the backyard, I saw a mother bring out milk to one of them, and laughing at something her daughter was showing her.

I stood there, tears streaming down my face and thinking..I am only fourteen years old! Why, oh Why is all this happening to us.. What did we do that was so horrible to treat us as if we were wild

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to run, to dance, just to enjoy and experience all the wonderful things life has to offer. Instead, we were reduced to live day to day without any happiness or hope, our family lives ruined.
I remembered my summers at my grandfather's together with my cousins visiting us from Berlin, running in the fields, swimming in the river, collecting berries -- now my grandfather was killed by the Germans, my aunts and uncles in Ghetto, living a few streets from us -- but we could hardly see each other.
i heard my mother's footsteps behind me. She stood next to me, a look of pain in her face and in her eyes.
:Cesia, please come and stay close to me", she kept repeating.
"I can't, Mommy, please, understand. I feel as if I am bursting, and I am full of fear", I broke down then crying and fell into her arms. "Mommy, this is madness, I can't understand any of it."
My father walked up to as at that moment, and told us that they had a meeting in the house, and decided to put all of us with "K" upstairs in the attic, where they made a false partition in order to hide us behind it. There were about 10 of us that will go upstairs, and the ones with the "stamp" will stay down-stairs.
About two hours later, after we settled upstairs, a group of Jewish policemen, we called them "Capo", started to go from house to house verifying the papers and collecing everybody with "K" to be taken out and led to the waiting trains, destination unknown.
Suddenly, we heard someone coming up the stairs, and knocking on our partition telling us to come out. To our horror, we recognized

that the "Capo" taking us was the son of one of the women hidden with us..

All of us, including the Capo's mother, were taken out to the backyard, and allowed to say good buy. We kissed and hugged my father, who was staying behind, and our small, sad procession. surrounded by Capos, started to walk down the street. I held on to my mother's hand, shaking in terror.

The first house we passed was our neighbors'. She lived there with her two daughters, but her husband was in Canada. presently, in front of their house, the mother and her two daughters were laughing and crying out loudly: 'We are saved! My husband got us visas to leave from Canada, and we are leaving tomorrow! "

This "CAmeo Shot" remains forever embedded inm my memory. I couldn't believe what I heard in the darkest moment of my life in hell; as if I saw someone climbing out of it right in front of my eyes..Two emotions fought within me -- One, I was happy for her, but the other, even stronger, resented her displaying her happiness in front of all us, while we were led like lambs to a slaughter..

I looked upward and with all my pain and fear, I cried out with all my heart to God.."O God in Heaven, if Thour art there, - help me now, show me a real miracle and save me. I promise you I will always remember this moment, never forget it, and will tell everyone I can about it, that I cried out to you and you heard me - just as you did for those people next to me dancing in joy.

Then, I looked down, and told myself "You fool, how can you possibly expect anything now.."Forgive me God, I know it cannot be dowe."

At that exact moment, the next house we were passing was a building where Jewish pppppe were allowed to work in. The only such building in our Ghetto. There was a group of people standing in front of it. As I looked to my right, I suddenly Saw someone standing in the shadow of the doorway. As I was passing the door, without a word, my mother suddenly released my hand, I was grabbed by my elbow, pulled into the hall, and the door was shut. The small procession including my mother, continued down the street - I never saw my mother again.

Wt total silence, I was pulled to the back of the house, thrown into a pig-sty, and a commodore showed against the door, to hide the entrance, and only then I hear a whisper: "This is Jurek, stay quietly here and I will runs to your father and tell him where I hid you. just as Jurek appeared out of nowwhere mysterioiusly, that's how he disappeared -- I have never seen him again, and could never find him...

A total stillness came over and round me. The whole incident was so sudden and in silence, that until now I hardly realized what happened. Only now, I realized the enormity of what had occurred.

I started to shake and cry. "Oh, my God , what did I do. I prayed for a miracle, and You did it. But I prayed only for myself, not my mother. She is gone, and I will never see her again..She is all alone now. I was her only comfort, and I

stay close to her today, I kept running away, and now - instead of holding on to her, I left her. The feeling of guilt was so overwhelming, that I did not care to live any longer..
At that moment I heard a voice - it was my father's. "Cesia, darling, Jurek came over to tell me where he hid you. I am so thankful and happy."
"Father" I cried out - "I am so unhappy I have no wish to live in this world any more. mother left all alone, and I fell so guilty'.
'My dear", he answered. 'One day I hope you'll be a mother yourself, and you'll understand how happy she is that you were pulled out. I also need you now, we are left together. I understand how you feel right now, but we will help each other. Stay here for a while, and I will look for a place to hide you. I will fetch you later".
With these words he left, and i remained alone again. his words made me feel better, but s till i felt as if a fever from within started to burn me up. My body started to shake and a tremendous strength came over me. I looked around at - my eyes became accustomed to the darkness. The stank was unbearable. Suddenly I started to hear footsteps of people running around, shouting. I could not stand it any longer -- I did not care what happened to me, I wanted to get out.
With my new found strength, and with my bare hands, I started to dig a hole under the commode until I was able to push my body underneath i I came out, full of dirt and smudge, and in a daze started to walk back to my house and to my father.

The Capos were all around me, people clustered, pushed around, screaming, children crying..shots ringing..and I kept walking. Nobody stopped me or asked questions..it was as if I was invisible. I walked into the house, and my father stood there aghast at what I had done.

He came over to me, went down on his knees, hugging and kissing me, and crying at the same time.

"please, my love, my only child, you must be saved for my own and your mother's sake. We loved you more than life itself. you were saved for a purpose and you must survive. We fixed up the attic and you will go upstairs again with a few other people that remained here. Wait a few days till this madness is over, and then we will see further...

June, 1938

I woke up happy and excited! I am leaving for sleep-away camp! After lots of tears, pleading and cajoling, my mother finally relented. My bed, beddings, and other incidentals were sent beforehand. The camp was located only 2 hours by train from Tarnow, my hometown. To understand better my excitement - I must explain that I was an only child (later on I found out from my Aunt Gina that my mother couldn't have any more children). I was pampered and over protected. Our maid had to carry my books to school- God forbid my shoulder shouldn't sag!. I used to be so embarrased that I would send Marysia (name or our maid) away a few blocks from the school, so that I could continue alone. I wasn't allowed to ski, swim, or ride a bicycle. So now, you'll understand my victory.

I got up that morning very early, tip-toed to my father so as not to wake up my mother - and asked him to start early. We had a horse named "kasztan" (chestnut in English) and a buggy. This was our means of transportation. There were no cars in Tarnow - only trams and buses. We had a man, named Jurek, who took care of the horse, and during the week the buggy was changed into a long wooden wagon, where wheat and other grain were driven to a flour mill and exchanged for flour. (I'll explain my parents' business later) Jurek was hired for this purpose. On the week-end, we rode in the buggy, visiting our relatives and excursions in the area. The population in Tarnow was about 75,000 people - 50% Jews.

When my father woke up, I saw my mother up as well and in tears. She couldn't sleep the whole night - and announced to both of us that under no circumstances am I allowed to go to the camp.I looked at her utterly in shock. "Mommy, how could you do this to me? All my friends will be there - I want to go too!" There was no way in which to convince her.

I decided to go on a hunger strike. I wouldn't eat, wouldnn'talk - and cried. My father and Marysia tried to sneak in some food to me, but I wouldn't touch it. My mother said "When she will get really hungry, she will ask for it". Well, I was just as stubborn as she - I din't. Towards the evening, however, I just could't stand it any longer and I thought:"I will have to ask her now for some food" .. At that exact moment, my mother couldn't stand it any longer either. She grabbed my arm, gave me a good spanking, sat me down on a chair, ordering: "Now, EAT!" I was so happy that she gave finally in, not I - and I was so hungry -- that I didn't mind the spanking at all , and was only too happy to eat.

Next day - my mother came in to tell me that I can go to the camp, and my father will take me. I found out that my parents had a big fight over this issue, and he won! I was beside myself with joy. I said my good-byes to mommy, Marysia and Jurek -- and off we went!

When we arrived at the camp, I got a big ovation!. Everybody was wondering whose empty bed it was - and they were happy to see me. My father stayed for lunch, then returned home.

What a great feeling to be on my own! I immediately felt at ease - and began to enjoy the daily routine. A few days later, while playing soft ball, I was running to retrieve the ball which fell into bushes..and suddenly...I found myself staring into the face of...Marysia!. "What are you doing here?"..She confessed: "Your mother was so nervous thinking how you are managing there, that she sent me on a train and report to her if you are all right". I told her to tell my mother that I feel wonderful and am very happy -- and to do it every again, because if anyone would find out about it, it would be very embarrassing for me.

This summer proved to be a most memorable one for me. There were so called "clicks" of girls and boys, where it was difficult to break into. One of these groups were older girls I admired and wanted so much to belong to. They considered me a "baby" - and said they must put me to test if I am old enough to join them. They proceded to ask me an "important" question: "Do you know why our counselor didnt go swimming yesterday?" I thought for a while, and said:"Of course I know!" "What letter does it begin with?" they asked. I said :"Letter P". (What I really meant was that she was ashamed of showing her breasts...breast in Polish is "piersi " -- and "period" in Polish means "menstruation" in English) "Oh!" - they exclaimed - "she knows". She is old enought to join us". And so, I joined the "exclusive" group of girls who were the leaders in the camp -- and many times I had to make believe I understood things...which I didn't. But it was worth it..because I enjoyed their company, and learned many things from them.

The summer was spent in hiking, excursions, games, singing, etc. I wasn't able to participate in one sport however - swimming. Before I left, mother made me promise not to swim..again, she was afraid that I might get hurt. So...I had to compromise.

There was one boy in camp -- his name was Lubek Stein - who was the most popular boy in the camp and all the girls were in love with him. He never even acknowledged my presence - and , to be truthful he totally ignored me. This was my first "crush" - and I spent days thinking of him and of ways to make him notice me.

At the end of the summer, we were preparing a show for our parents who were coming to camp to pick us up at the end of the summer. I came up with an idea. I went to the councelor and told her I have an idea of a "Viennese Waltz" and would like to chorcograph it. The scene would be a darkened room -- a boy and girl standing at the opposite end of the room -- they hear the music...Viennese waltz..and they start dancing towards each other...almost like a ballet step..suddenly, in the middle, they stop...look at each other--the lights get brighter..they walk around each other slowly...looking at each other..then the boy takes the girl in his arms, and they begin to dance together...the Viennese Waltz....

I requested Lubek as my partner. The counselor loved my idea, especially since I knew how to dance, but wasnt sure if she can convince Lubek to do it. When she approached him with my idea, he absolutely refused it!. He said he doesn't know how to dance and he doesn't like this whole romantic notion...NO WAY! One day, when I saw him alone, I came up to him, and suggested that I would like to teach him how to dance, and if he doesn't like it, then we forget about it. I told him "at least you'll learn how to dance the waltz, and you'll impress the girls".. This appealed to his ego.

The big day arrived!. I asked Marysia to come early in the morning, and bring me my lovely blue silk dress, shoes, ribbons and make up. When she came, we locked ourselves in the room, and she helped prepare for the "big entrance". Nobody was allowed to see me, except Marysia and one of my friends.

Lubek and I practised our dancing, and he really enjoyed it. We were waiting for our cue...but Lubek never saw me in my dress until we entered the darkened stage, and faced each other. The music started..and we moved towards each other. When the lights got brighter and we stood facing each other...I saw the astonished look in Lubek's eyes. It was as if he saw me really for the first time. We danced like in a dream, and at the end, he gave me a kiss on my cheek. When we finished, we got a standing ovation..and Lubek fell in love with me on that day...